

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

281530Z Nov 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 001803

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W  
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL INDECISION THREATENS SYSTEM  
OVERHEATING

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D)

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

1. (C) In a late October conversation with the Consul General, Kwara State Governor Bukola Saraki described three approaches President Obasanjo could follow regarding the 2007 elections: amend the constitution to extend his current term, reconcile with the Vice President and support his candidacy for president, or identify an acceptable successor from the ranks of the current state governors. The middle option is being progressively sandwiched and overshadowed by the other two. Saraki's counsel to the President has been to take the third approach, with Governors Yar'Adua of Katsina and Makarfi of Kaduna as the possible leading candidates, in that order. However, Saraki fears the President prefers to remain in office, and expects significant northern outcry as a result. End summary.

-----  
BACKGROUND  
-----

2. (C) Kwara State Governor Bukola Saraki presented his views on President Obasanjo's position on the upcoming 2007 election during an October 29th meeting with the Consul General. Saraki, the smart son of Kwara State political godfather Olu Saraki, is in his first term and looks forward to winning a second term in 2007.

3. (C) Although sympathetic to Vice President Atiku, Saraki maintains an amiable relationship with the President. Obasanjo has chided the Governor in conversations for his pro-Atiku leanings but apparently does not regard Saraki as a die-hard Atiku supporter. Thus, according to Saraki, his relationship with Obasanjo is not antagonistic, and Obasanjo considers Saraki a sufficiently creditable performer, which is a significantly better assessment than Obasanjo gives any of the staunchly pro-Atiku governors.

4. (C) Saraki described three approaches the President could take regarding the elections: continuing in office through the duration of an extended second term, reconciling with and supporting the Vice President as his successor, and identifying an acceptable compromise successor candidate from among the current governors.

-----  
OPTION 1: EXTENDING THE CURRENT TERM  
-----

5. (C) Saraki stated that the President's preference is to amend the constitution, establishing a single presidential term of six years, with the term extension effective immediately. This would keep Obasanjo in office another two years. (Comment: This limitation of course depends on there not being yet another constitutional amendment. End comment.)

6. (C) Saraki was skeptical about the President's ability to garner enough support for this maneuver. Constitutional amendments require adoption by 24 states, and Saraki forecasted the President could not get that number of states in his corner. For instance, Obasanjo would have a difficult time gaining the assent of the eight northern states controlled by All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) governors. Any ANPP governor that publicly endorsed Obasanjo's extension would be casting his own political career into a furnace, Saraki proffered. Likewise, the AD-controlled Lagos State would oppose Obasanjo's bid, as would the party-less Governor Ngige of Anambra State. (Ngige previously was evicted from the PDP.) Edo, Delta, Imo, Abia, and Akwa Ibom are controlled by the pro-Atiku governors who would fight Obasanjo's extension with all assets at their disposal. Additionally, the PDP governor of Adamawa State is Atiku's political younger brother and this filial relationship would withstand any pressure that Obasanjo could marshal on that governor. Last, states like Benue, Ebonyi and Niger, the

latter being the home of presidential hopeful and former military leader Ibrahim Babangida, were undecided, and could go against Obasanjo. All in all, Saraki thought Obasanjo could only get half of the states on his side. Despite the hurdles, Saraki continued, the President currently favors this course of action.

17. (C) Additionally, a constitutional amendment would take a super-majority of the National Assembly. Given Obasanjo's testy relationship with that body, Saraki predicted Obasanjo would have a difficult time finding the requisite support notwithstanding the number of carrots and sticks he might brandish.

-----  
OPTION 2: A NONSTARTER - RECONCILING WITH ATIKU  
-----

18. (C) The second scenario Saraki outlined has the President and Vice President reconciling to a point where the President supports the Vice President in 2007. This scenario was the most unlikely and exists only in theory, said Saraki. To Saraki, President Obasanjo has described his relationship with Atiku as dead, and the schism has resisted all attempts to mend it, by party leaders and traditional rulers alike. Obasanjo simply does not want to be succeeded by Atiku, explained Saraki.

19. (C) Saraki described the President's strategy was to undermine Atiku by isolating the Vice President. The President would accomplish this by frightening Atiku's supporters then wresting the party machinery from them and the Vice President. According to Saraki, the President deliberately chose Atiku opponents to oversee the recent Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) registration exercise. Pro-Atiku governors were placed on their haunches when Obasanjo appointed opponents of these governors to shepherd membership registration in their respective states. As a price for their affinity for Atiku, these governors lost control of who could join the PDP in their states. Obasanjo's strong-arming weakened several Vice Presidential supporters, recounted Saraki. Governors Goje of Gombe State, Akume of Benue State, and Nyame of Taraba State all turned to the President swearing their loyalty. Reportedly, Obasanjo accepted their entreaties and returned control to them of the registration process in their states. Pro-Atiku southern governors have remained in the Vice President's camp. Saraki expects some of them may yet return to the Presidential fold, but others will stick to Atiku to the bitter end. Saraki believed that these hardliners would adhere to Atiku not necessarily out of principle but because they mistrusted Obasanjo even more than they were frightened by him. No matter the overtures the President might make, governors such as Ibori in Delta and Igbiniedion in Edo felt they could not reach amends with him.

110. (C) Eventually, the President's unyielding approach may cause some governors to leave the PDP, Saraki continued, however, current PDP leadership seemed more focused on making a soft bed for Obasanjo supporters but a hard place for Atiku's. Loyalty matters more than numbers. If some unfaithful choose to leave the PDP, so be it, Saraki summarized as Obasanjo's attitude.

-----  
OPTION 3: IDENTIFYING AN ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE CANDIDATE  
-----

111. (C) If the political pressure were removed, the vast majority of PDP governors would oppose Obasanjo's continuation. The governors are meeting constantly in large and small packs to reach consensus on a compromise candidate acceptable to the President, confided Saraki. A unified front would give each maximum political cover from potential presidential ire. It would also help show that a constitutional amendment was unlikely. Their focus has been on identifying an acceptable northern governor, thus fulfilling the deal reached in 2003 for the President to come from the North. To make this course more amenable to President Obasanjo, Saraki continued, the governors would have to emphasize that this tack would assure the President the distinction of being the first elected Nigerian civilian chief executive to hand over to another elected civilian. Thus, Obasanjo's place in history would be guaranteed by conducting a fair election and by his accomplishments in the arena of economic reform.

112. (C) Some northern governors under consideration were Adamu of Nasarawa, Muazu of Bauchi, Makarfi of Kaduna, and Yar'Adua of Katsina, with Makarfi and Yar'Adua the most attractive candidates in Saraki's estimation. Saraki liked Muazu but questioned whether he had sufficient scope to handle the presidency, and Adamu was viewed as a poor administrator and too much in the President's pocket.

113. (C) Saraki said Ahmed Makarfi of Kaduna was an able

political strategist who has been doing a good job pre-positioning himself as a dark horse. Makarfi is intelligent and a good governor, Saraki maintained. However, Umaru Yar'Adua, governor of Katsina State, was the truly intriguing prospect, according to Saraki. Yar'Adua is quiet, has received good reviews for his performance in office, and he would likely continue Obasanjo's economic reform programs, but with a more humane approach.

14. (C) Most significantly, Yar'Adua is the younger brother of late General Shehu Yar'Adua, founder of the Peoples Front of Nigeria (PFN), which later became the Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM). When General Yar'Adua died, PFN leadership fell to Atiku Abubakar, the current Vice President. If Umaru Yar'Adua were nominated as a presidential candidate, many of Atiku's supporters would become double-minded and Atiku's claim that he was championing the Yar'Adua legacy would lose credence. Atiku could lose a significant chunk of his rank-and-file support. The resultant diminution of Atiku's political base by the ascendancy of Yar'Adua would be a consideration Obasanjo would find highly attractive because it would also make it difficult for Atiku to leave the PDP to join forces with another group. Umaru Yar'Adua also enjoys a decent relationship with Obasanjo.

-----  
SARAKI'S ADVICE TO THE PRESIDENT  
-----

15. (C) Governor Saraki has said he would continue conferring with his fellow PDP governors to rally around Makarfi or Yar'Adua as worthy successors to Obasanjo, with Yar'Adua as the top choice. Yar'Adua is on no one's blacklist, he has shown himself to be a capable public servant while serving as Katsina governor, and he would satisfy the call for a President from the north. To complete the ticket, a southern Vice Presidential candidate would be in order. Saraki listed Duke of Cross River, Egwu of Ebonyi, and Attah of Akwa Ibom as capable choices. Saraki's sense, however, is that the President's favorite from the south is Peter Odili of Rivers State, whose selection would set a poor example given Odili's "self-enrichment" while in office.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

16. (C) The President's continued silence about his position in 2007 is causing increased political turbulence. A first term governor, Saraki has no national ambitions for now and just wants to get to his second term with his state and the nation in one piece. Saraki is in the position to play as honest a broker as one can find among the crop of Nigerian elected officials. His assessment of Obasanjo jibes with most others we have gotten. Saraki's identification of Yar'Adua as a possible candidate is creative and it also further indicates to what extent the Obasanjo-Atiku rift influences all else, including the discovery of a possible way out of this face-off. At bottom, the real question is whether Obasanjo stays past 2007. Most who know the President indicate he does not appear to be a man looking to pack his suitcase. Should he decide to try to hold on, his decision will meet with considerable opposition within the party and in the region where Saraki hopes the next president will come - the North. End comment.  
BROWNE